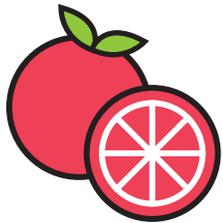




## Awareness of Birth Defects

*Birth defects can happen for many reasons. Although not all birth defects can be prevented, people can increase their chances of having a healthy baby by managing health conditions and adopting healthy behaviors before becoming pregnant. Here are steps you can take to get ready for pregnancy, stay healthy during pregnancy, and give your baby a healthy start in life:*



**Get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.** Folic acid is a B vitamin. If a woman has enough folic acid in her body at least 1 month before and during pregnancy, it can help prevent major birth defects of the developing baby's brain and spine. Women can get folic acid from fortified foods or supplements, or a combination of the two, in addition to a varied diet rich in folate. [Learn more about folic acid.](#)

**Prevent infections.** Some infections that a woman might get during pregnancy can be harmful to the developing baby and can even cause birth defects. Check out our [10 tips for preventing infections](#) before and during pregnancy.



**See a healthcare professional regularly.** Be sure to see a doctor when planning a pregnancy and start prenatal care as soon as possible. It is important to see your physician throughout your pregnancy. Keeping all prenatal care appointments, even telehealth appointments, should be a priority.

**Keep diabetes under control.** Unmanaged diabetes can increase the chance for birth defects and other problems during pregnancy. To manage your diabetes, see your healthcare provider as recommended before and during pregnancy. Also monitor your blood sugar levels, follow a healthy eating plan developed with your healthcare provider or dietician, [be physically active](#), and take insulin as directed. Learn more about how to manage [type 1 or type 2 diabetes during pregnancy](#) and [gestational diabetes](#).





**Avoid alcohol at any time during pregnancy.** Alcohol in a woman's bloodstream passes to the developing baby through the umbilical cord. Alcohol use during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, and a range of disabilities. There is no known safe amount of alcohol use during pregnancy or while trying to get pregnant. There is also no safe time during pregnancy to drink. All types of alcohol are equally harmful, including all wines and beer. [Learn more about alcohol and pregnancy.](#)

**Avoid smoking cigarettes.** The dangers of smoking during pregnancy include preterm birth, certain birth defects ([cleft lip or cleft palate](#)), and infant death. Quitting smoking before getting pregnant is best. For a woman who is already pregnant, quitting as early as possible can still help protect against some health problems for the baby, such as low birth weight. It's never too late to quit smoking. [Learn more about smoking during pregnancy.](#)



**Avoid marijuana and other drugs.** Marijuana use during pregnancy may be linked to lower birth weight in infants. There is no known safe level of marijuana use during pregnancy. Women who are pregnant or considering becoming pregnant should not use marijuana, even in states where marijuana is legal. Women using marijuana for medical reasons should speak with their healthcare provider about an alternative therapy that's safer for pregnant women. [Learn more about substance use during pregnancy.](#)

**Avoid overheating and treat fever promptly.** During pregnancy, a woman should avoid overheating and treat fever promptly. Overheating can be caused by a fever or exposure to high temperatures (such as getting in a hot tub) that increases a woman's core temperature. Overheating can increase a woman's chance of having a baby with certain birth defects.



**For more information, visit**

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/awareness-month/before-during-pregnancy.html>

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